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FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6484
INFO RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA 2654
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0155

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 001292

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STATE FOR WHA/CEN, CA/VO/L/A, AND CA/VO/L/C

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/31/2017

TAGS: [CVIS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [HO](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT ZELAYA AND AMBASSADOR DISCUSS TRIP TO
MANAGUA AND NEW UN AMBASSADOR

REF: A. TEGUCIGALPA 1247

[1](#)B. STATE 98124

Classified By: AMB. CHARLES FORD. REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. In response to a request by the GOH, Ambassador Ford met with Honduran President "Mel" Zelaya, Foreign Minister Milton Jimenez and proposed Ambassador to the United Nations Jorge Arturo Reina. Zelaya used the first part of the meeting to offer another explanation for his trip to Managua to attend the Sandinista Revolution commemoration with Daniel Ortega and Hugo Chavez. This time the trip was to prepare Daniel Ortega for the upcoming International Court of Justice ruling of their shared maritime boundary that Zelaya believes will be decided in Honduras's favor. Ambassador Ford pointed out the trip received so much attention in Honduras because of the lack of movement on key issues on our bilateral agenda; there is very little else to talk about. Zelaya agreed and committed his government to begin work on five or six key issues of mutual interest in the areas of regional security, economic development, corruption and social justice.

[1](#)2. (C) CONT. SUMMARY. The second part of the meeting was devoted to Jorge Arturo Reina trying to make a case in his own favor for the issuance of a visa so he can travel to New York. Reina tried to argue that he was never as radical as the USG may have believed and his terrorist-related activities were not that serious and can be explained. He offered to meet with Post officials to provide more details. Neither President Zelaya nor Minister Jimenez offered any strong support for Reina nor did they appeal to the Ambassador for his assistance in this matter. It appears Reina will be on his own when dealing with Post on the visa request. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)3. (C) Honduran President "Mel" Zelaya, Foreign Minister Milton Jimenez, and recently nominated Honduran Ambassador to the United Nations Jorge Arturo Reina met with Ambassador Ford and Poloff on July 27. The Hondurans requested the meeting and, while they did not offer a reason for the request, Post expected that Zelaya wished to discuss his selection of Jorge Arturo Reina as the new Honduran Ambassador to the U.N. and seek Post's help in obtaining the G-1 visa so that Reina could travel to the United States to perform his new duties (see refTel A for a more detailed explanation of Reina's visa problems).

Another Reason Offered for the Managua Trip

[1](#)4. (C) Zelaya began the meeting by offering another reason

for his recent trip to Managua to participate with Daniel Ortega and Hugo Chavez in the ceremony commemorating the Sandinista Revolution of 1979. Obviously forgetting that he had told the Deputy Secretary that the purpose of the trip was to warn Ortega and Chavez to stay out of internal Honduran politics and not to support Honduran political campaigns (reftel B), Zelaya told the Ambassador that the focus of the trip was to establish friendly relations with Ortega in anticipation of the eventual International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling on the Honduras - Nicaragua maritime boundary case. Oral arguments in that case were heard in March, and the GOH expects a ruling in its favor soon. Zelaya stated that he talked with Ortega regarding the creation of a commission to implement the ICJ's ruling. Promotion of trade was another reason for the trip, according to Zelaya. He pointed out that Nicaragua is the only country with which Honduras has a positive trade balance, and Zelaya would like to see the amount of trade between the two countries increase.

15. (C) Zelaya attempted to brush off any objection by Honduran politicians to his meeting with Ortega and Chavez with the explanation that all countries have groups of friends, and sometimes those groups do not get along with each other. Honduras can be friends with Nicaragua and Venezuela, who are in one group, and with the U.S. which is in another. Zelaya did not see any problem with his close contacts with Nicaragua and Venezuela and stated that those contacts should not affect Honduras's relation with the U.S. Zelaya stressed he considers the Honduras - U.S. relationship very important and wants to maintain a close and strong friendship.

Creation of a Shared Agenda

16. (C) Passing over Zelaya's explanations for his Managua trip, Ambassador Ford explained that the reason that trip received so much interest is because there is very little else to focus on in the Honduras - U.S. relationship. Zelaya has been in office for almost 1.5 years, yet there is still no movement on a shared agenda. In fact, it does not appear that the Zelaya administration has an agenda and no progress is being made on those key areas that are important to the USG. The President responded by pulling out a small notebook and making a list of those topics he considered most important to address: security, commercial interests, the Millennium Challenge Account, the justice system and the environment.

17. (C) Ambassador Ford responded with his own list and elaborated on specific issues within each of the following areas: (1) Regional Security: publication of the National Security Strategy and use of peacekeepers, along with the use of SICA to promote regional security; (2) Economic: society-wide macro-economic issues must be addressed, in addition to the specific problems at the state-owned telephone company (Hondutel) and electric company (ENEE); (3) Rule of law and corruption to include increased prosecutions and judicial system reform; and (4) Social justice issues. The Ambassador stressed that those are the key areas that must be part of a joint agenda. Zelaya agreed with the list and stated he is ready to start the process at the Presidential level to move that agenda forward. He tasked his Foreign Minister with pulling together a working meeting to make some initial decisions soon after President Lula's August 7 visit.

Reina's Visa Plea

18. (C) The conversation eventually turned toward the primary purpose of the meeting: what can be done to obtain a G-1 visa for Jorge Arturo Reina so he can assume his position at the United Nations? Zelaya made only a few general comments in

support of his proposed ambassador, highlighting his family relationship with Reina, Reina's long service in various Honduran administrations and his desire for Reina to go to New York. Zelaya did not make a direct request for the visa nor did he argue that USG must grant Reina a visa to travel to the U.N. Instead, after his brief introduction, he motioned to Reina to make his own case. Foreign Minister Jimenez did not offer any support or make any comments in Reina's favor.

¶9. (C) Reina tried to disavow his early radical days and claimed he was never a Communist. He also tried to wave off his early activities in various radical groups, commenting that all that happened so long ago in the 1960s and 1970s. He is still proud of his support for the Sandinista takeover of Nicaragua and argued that the Sandinistas were fighting for a good cause and the whole world wanted Somoza gone. Reina was very general in discussing the terrorist-related allegations against him and tried to dismiss them as either never occurring or they were not as serious as the USG may think. In the end, Reina offered to meet with Post officials to talk about the allegations and stated he will "come clean" about his early activities.

¶10. (C) Ambassador Ford responded that Post will try to accommodate Reina's visa request but made no guarantee as to the eventual outcome or a timeframe for a final decision. The one condition requested by the Ambassador, and quickly agreed to by Zelaya, was that the GOH keep this matter out of the papers, particularly any characterization of US views on this visa. The local media does not need to know every step of this visa application process. Zelaya ended the subject by telling Reina to work with Post on this matter.

¶11. (C) COMMENT. Obtaining President Zelaya's commitment to begin work on five or six key items that are essential for the Honduran - U.S. agenda was the important result of this meeting. Post will develop the proposed agenda in detail and push the GOH to commence working jointly on the items. As for the visa problem, neither Zelaya nor Reina appeared to believe the issue will be resolved in their favor. Zelaya offered only minimal support for his candidate while Reina's speech was rather short and it did not appear that even Reina believed what he was saying. Reina appeared to simply be going through the motions of arguing on his own behalf but not believing that his explanations would change the outcome. This may signal that Zelaya will not give Reina much time to resolve the visa issue and if the matter reaches an impasse

or takes too long, Zelaya may pick another candidate. Reina's visa is now solely a matter between him and the USG, while Zelaya and Minister Jimenez distance themselves from the problem. END COMMENT.

FORD